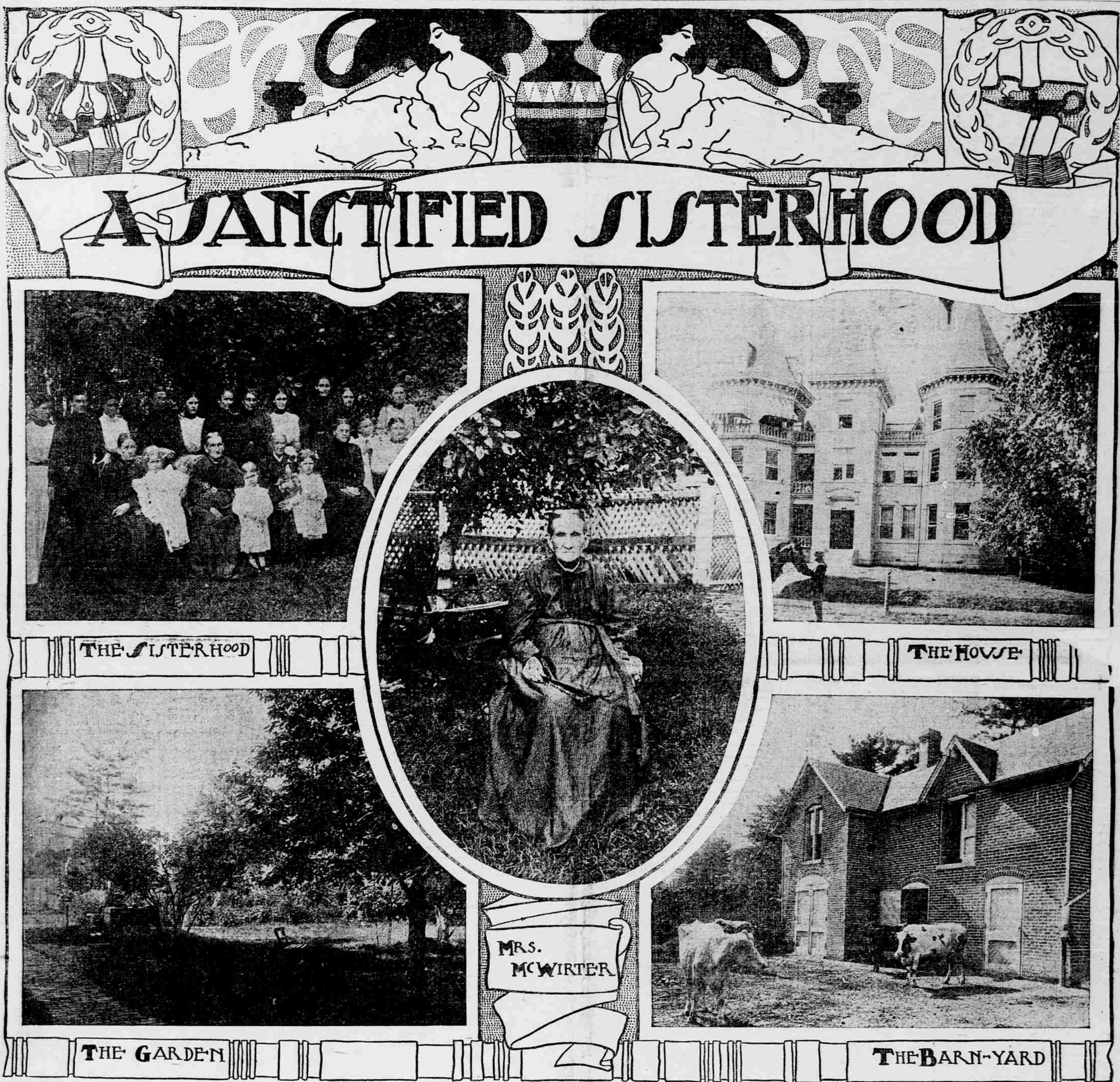


WASHINGTON, SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 1902.



Unique Co-operative Association of "New Women," Who Have Asserted Independence of Men and Made Their Own Way in Life, Despite Hard- ship and Opposition.

THE HOME of the Sanctified Sisterhood is in the heart of Mount Pleasant, Washington, D. C. It is an organization of women, unique in character and purpose. It is the only one of its kind known in the whole world. It is a religious club, a stock company, a study club, and a travel class, all in one. It is guided not by constitution and promulgated by-laws, but simply and solely by revelations.

Unique Organization.

This unique organization of women sprang into existence over a quarter of a century ago, in a little town in Texas, and has survived with true Western grit through vicissitudes that would have proven the death of the ordinary woman's club. Under the most discouraging circumstances and unsympathetic surroundings these unlettered women by their hard labors have accumulated property now worth all of a quarter of a million of dollars.

This strange society of women started in a strange way. For mutual sympathy and help in the dreariness of their common lot a dozen of the townswomen of Belton, Tex., formed themselves into a "ladies' prayer meeting," which met one afternoon each week in the home of the different members. The Bible was studied

and discussed under the leadership of Mrs. Martha McWhirter.

Theories Became Convictions.

Theories, at first timidly advanced within the sympathetic circle, finally became convictions to be declared abroad, much to the horror of the orthodox, who straightway scented heresy. The hitherto harmless regarded "ladies' prayer meetings" had become a flaming firebrand, lighted by sparks from the other place. The town was wild with excitement. The offending women belonging to Belton's first families could not be ostracized socially, but it was plain to see that something had to be done and quickly.

Trials for heresy were at once held under every little church steeple in the place and twelve women were given back their letters, this being the highest form of disapproval within churchly bestowal. Still the "ladies' prayer meetings" continued their sessions undaunted, meeting solely for the study of the scriptures and observation along border lines.

One Step Precipitated Another.

This one step of independence precipitated another. The allowance question began to be the burden of the common prayer. These primitive "new women" resented the fact that instead of being regarded as co-partners in the household

firm they were required to ask "him" for all the money expended for household necessities, to be granted with condescension or not at all, according to "his" mood.

I will give you, for example, the experience of one of the head members. She wanted \$1.50 one day to get a pair of house slippers for herself, and so after dinner she went into the library, and calling her husband by name, asked him for the amount. He questioned her as to the use of it. She replied it was for a necessity.

Asserted Independence.

After asking several times without having her request granted, she took her first step forward and asserted her independence. She told him from that day forth he should never put another penny in that house under any circumstances, nor should he ever give the children a cent; that she intended to run the house, support the family, and have plenty in the bargain, without begging for it. He only smiled, thinking, of course, her threat but an outburst of passion. He told her, man-like, she must be crazy. She knew differently. He laughed and told her whenever she wanted money she knew where to come and get it, but she said that would never happen again, and it never did. He remained at home for six or eight months after that, when he left her, but she never broke the vow she made. The day after a meeting was called and Mrs. McWhirter told her troubles. The women approved of the stand she had taken and then and there one and all declared they would henceforth and forever make their own living.

A plan was outlined: its basis was unity. Each was to live with the others

and each was to labor for the common good of all. Since that time they have lived and labored as one large and happy family. All of them vowed not to accept a penny from their husbands, and they didn't.

By selling butter, eggs, and other farm products they soon raised quite a comfortable sum, which they put into a small hotel or inn, and ran it with great success. At the start each one gave a set of her furniture or furnished a room, and sometimes two, from the household until furniture became a mighty scarce article at home. Finally they decided there was no use going home just for the night, so they closed their homes and established themselves in the inn. Where a father insisted upon his children going to church and Sunday school these sanctified sisters left family as well as hearthstones. They offered, however, to take husbands along if they would be good and behave, and not try to boss things. So the inn filled quickly.

Men Considered It a Joke.

The men took it as a huge joke at first, declaring that no dozen women could live under one roof peacefully, and allowed that Mary and Martha would be tired of their foolishness and he back home tearful and penitent within a week. But they didn't know. These plain, hard-working, church-going men didn't realize the strength of this dollar-and-a-half-cent movement, backed, as it was, by the fanatical belief that theirs was the only right way to serve the Lord. For the sanctified sisters are God-fearing, God-loving and God-serving. They had their way and chose to follow it, not questioning the right of others to do the same. And so the inn prospered and grew.

Money was accumulated. Each woman worked the harder and was the more contented because she knew that what she earned was hers. Each had a task assigned, did it well and, wonder of wonders, did it without complaint.

Only Two Withdrawals.

In the thirty-odd years there have been but two withdrawals, and these of two foolish maidens who married from the commonwealth only to regret it bitterly. The next move was to Waco, Texas, where quite a pretentious hotel was built and paid for spot cash. This they called the "Royal." Mrs. McWhirter was known and spoken of as the noted founder and evangelist of the church in Belton, Texas, called Sanctificationists. They continued in the hotel business about fifteen years, remaining in Waco and successfully running the Royal until three years ago, when they decided to sell and come to Washington, cease toil, and enjoy the full fruits of their hard-earned money.

One Man for Heavy Work.

Mrs. McWhirter is a woman of remarkable personality and executive ability. The rules of this organization are few and simple, and chiefly for the regulation of labor. There is only one man about the place, and he is a young negro about twenty-three years of age, whose name is William. He does all the heavy outdoor work and attends to the horse.

William has been with Mrs. McWhirter ever since he was a boy, and insisted upon following the Sanctified Sisters all the way from Texas, never leaving them for a day until last winter, when it suddenly occurred to him that he would like to see a bit of New York. Upon asking Mrs. McWhirter's permission for a few days'

Under Discouraging Circumstances and Unsympathetic Surroundings They Have Accumulated, by Hard Labor, Property Now Worth a Quarter of a Million Dollars.

leave, which was cheerfully granted him, he proceeded to prepare for his journey, expecting to stay about a week.

After having spent only one day in New York, William hastened to write Mrs. McWhirter, saying he was so homesick he was coming right back. The sisters were much delighted upon hearing this good news, as William's faithful services had been sadly missed, even though he had been gone but two days. He is one of the few of his race who know how to appreciate a good home. He is most respectful and polite, and remarkably systematic about his work, keeping everything just so. They raise all of their own vegetables and most every kind of fruit. Their four fine cows provide them with milk and butter, while the finest kind of buttermilk procurable in Washington meets with a ready sale during the summer.

Younger Members.

The younger members of this community are educated solely in the commonwealth; they are never sent to outside schools. The elder members are well fitted to teach these juniors in such studies as would be taught in the grammar schools. However, the young ones are not to study if they do not wish to. The only branch of instruction which is keenly pursued is that of cooking. You will not find

a single girl but what is a first-class cook. The products of their kitchens are eagerly sought for by outsiders.

No religious services are held at the home of the commonwealth. Such observance they consider useless. Their mode of life is simple and they strive rather to live righteously than to preach.

Called "Breakers of Peace."

Mrs. McWhirter says they have been held up for years as breakers of the peace and destroyers of the happiness of families, but she says they could not be the Christians that the Bible speaks of without it, and that it has been so in all ages—people had to leave their homes and live in mountains and caves and dress in sheep skins and goat skins in times past. They were also stoned and sawed asunder, were slain with sword and put to death in a thousand cruel ways. Why all of this? Because their lives were different from their neighbors' and their families'; and that brings to pass the words of Christ, "All men would hate us, our children would rise up against us and cause some to be put to death, and they of our own house would be our enemies," which is being fulfilled and has been wherever the life of Christ has been lived. We realize we are strangers, that the world

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